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ABSTRACT

The prerequisites of language acquisition are cognitive and pragmatic. The child's conceptual development and social needs direct his attention to particular linguistic forms. These provide an efficient selection device enabling the child to match his language learning task with his abilities. The second language learner who is cognitively and socially more advanced lacks such a natural regulator. However, because of his first language learning experience he has the lesser task of learning the language specific expressions of the language universals and not the universals per se. This may be one of the reasons that makes acceleration in second language acquisition possible. In order to be an efficient means of communication language must be clear and also expressive. The latter requirement makes it highly complex. The acquisition of the 'fine tunings' in language is a predictable, but fairly long process reaching into late adolescence. The second language learner's achievements are less predictable. He may spend less time on his language learning task. In addition, there are other factors that could account for individual differences in second language learning, e.g. acculturation, attitude and motivation, ego-permeability. (Author)

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# PREREQUISITES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

Marta Rado

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Language teaching is a communal responsibility.

We are all born with the capacity to learn and teach language. All adults as a corollary to their interaction with children as parents, relatives, friends, teachers, etc. play a language teaching role. This is a natural activity and we embark upon it even before we become mature speakers of a language. One of the devices we employ as natural language teachers is to adjust our speech to the capacities of the linguistically less mature.

Here are representative protocols to illustrate the contrast between the language of a 4-year-old when talking to mother and when talking to a younger child.

To mother about Ark:

> That's the thing that they climb up when the storm. Here are all the animals. This is the little brother, dad-dad, right? Daddy. I want it to be the daddy. ... They can't get in from the door, so you have to take this off. Wait, it's backwards. The first ones go in the very back, right? Where's the other giraffe? Here it is. Okay, now the piggies.

To younger child about Ark:

> This is a black bird. You get the black bird. I get the white bird. ... Don't put that in yet. Don't put that in there. They need some space. Now you put your giraffe in. Oh, I got both of the giraffes. No, don't. Don't put that there. This here. And I put mine here.

Deliberately, I have not drawn a distinction between learning one's L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) or FL (foreign language). (I shall use the terms L2 and FL interchangeably in this discussion). I have referred to language learning generally because we have a number of children in our school population who are developing two languages simultaneously. However, I do not propose to evade the controversial issue of the link between L1 and L2 acquisition: on the contrary, I intend to explore some

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aspects of it.

When does first language acquisition begin?

This topic raises many questions. The acquisition of L1 may start before birth. Lar (1973) observed the movement behaviour of non-crying vocalisations of new-born infants. She found that these were influenced by the -

> mother's movement rhythms, heart-beat and biochemical routine reactions (which are culturally determined) ... This suggests that neonates are preconditioned by experiential uterine timing of events and processes. Rhythms of language are probably learned in utero (p. XI).

If this is the case, then it should not surprise us to be told by Lieberman (1967) that the intonation pattern of the MT (mother tongue) is established by the first birthday. No wonder that it is difficult to acquire a native-like accent later in life. There may be less profit than previously supposed in insisting upon perfection of accent.

According to Halliday (1975) not only the phonological but also the functional aspects of language take precedence over the development of vocabulary and syntax. Halliday has provided us with information on the functional language development of his son Nigel, between 9 to 18 months. Significantly, Halliday's investigation explores the period before language modelled on the adult phonological and lexico-grammatical system begins, and stops soon after the adult system is adopted.

Although the sounds Nigel made were "not themselves identifiable as sounds drawn from the adult language", Halliday maintains that they could be regarded as constituting a linguistic system because the child was "using vocal sounds consistently and systematically, developing some kind of constant relation between sounds and meanings" (p.10). The child was using his own inventions, for example, nanana, systematically. Further, his meanings did not correspond exactly to the meanings of the adult language, and the distinctions that the child made did not correspond to the adult's

linguistic distinctions. His vocalisations, however, could be interpreted in functional terms. In other words, the functional use of language pre-empts the recognition of the conventional meanings of lexical items and sentences.

Haliday illustrates seven functions of language. They are listed in the order of their appearance with the "informative" significantly last.

| | |
|---|---|
| Instrumental | "I want" |
| Regulatory | "do as I tell you" |
| Interactional | "me and you" |
| Personal | "here I come" |
| Heuristic | "tell me why" |
| Imaginative | "let's pretend" |
| Informative | "I've got something to tell you" (p.37). |

The role of cognitive prerequisites in L1 and L2 acquisition.

Whereas Halliday draws our attention to the functional, Ervin-Tripp (1973), Slobin (1973) and others stress the cognitive prerequisites of language learning. They share Piaget's (1952) view that the roots of language are in our sensory-motor experiences, so that concept formation precedes its verbal expression. Cognitive development seems to be the child's natural guide in selecting the linguistic forms he should attend to.

> It is as if a spotlight moves over each grammatical element: when a particular form is focused on in the course of development, the child is struggling to master it--an auxiliary, a negative particle, an inflection. With mastery, the light moves on. The grammatical form is now in the shadow on the periphery of linguistic consciousness, joining into the rapid flow of un-self-conscious speaking (Slobin 1975:19).

The child's focus of interest regulates the selection at the discourse level as well. Ervin-Tripp (1973) argues that he attends only to those segments of speech that personally concern him. He ignores what is of no interest to him or what is beyond his linguistic capacity. The L1 learner is in perfect command of the situation. This enables him to match volume and type of language with his capacities.

In contrast, the L2 learner has no comparable natural selection device. His attention will be directed to the total corpus available and he will try to observe a large array of linguistic markers. By using his previous linguistic knowledge and by attempting to match the new language with his intellectual capacities, he will overload his language processing system, making it more difficult to separate eventually the incorrectly observed forms from the correct ones.

The significance of language universals in language learning

Undoubtedly, observation is paramount to language learning. Human beings can observe and therefore learn any language because in principle all languages are alike in that they express the same relationships based on the judgements human beings make about the world: "who did it, who it happened to, and what got changed" (Fillmore, 1968: 24). These are the concepts underlying Fillmore's case grammar which he describes as follows:

> The sentence in its basic structure consists of a verb and one or more noun phrases, each associated with the verb in a particular case relationship (p. 21).

The case relationships or roles are language universals, in that, they are independent of a particular language. Their diversity in expression is language specific. "In English, these case meanings are primarily expressed by a preposition or word order" (Brown, 1973: 133). Other languages might employ different devices such as affixation.

Fillmore uses conventional case names when referring to role relations. This can be misleading for the uninitiated. For instance, the grammatical category, subject, in English can fulfil various case roles, depending on the verb to which it relates. The following examples are based on Fillmore:

| | |
|---|---|
| John opened the door. | Agentive (A). The case of the typically animate perceived instigator of the action identified by the verb. |
| The key opened the door. | Instrumental (I). The case of the inanimate force or object causally involved in the action or state identified by the verb. |
| Daddy has a study. | Dative (D). The case of the animate being affected by the state or action identified by the verb. |
| Chicago is windy. | The case which identifies the location or spatial orientation of the state or action identified by the verb. |

(1968: 24-25)

Fillmore suggests that there is a preferred order of surface subject choice in English. In general if there is an Agentive it becomes the subject, otherwise it is the Instrumental, etc. Further, he posits six cases as unversals. Brown (1973) and Sørensen (1974) have been able to identify these in childrens' early utterances. At first all case markings are absent and the limit is two cases per sentence. The child is restricted in the number of cases it can combine, but not in the relationships it can handle. Recognition of these relationships may be one of the prerequisites of language. They are less abstract than syntactic relationships and take precedence over them. Later, when grammatical marking does occur the preferred order of subjectivalization seems toplay a role. This explains the differential acquisition of the pairs like give/receive. They have the same case frames +(-A,O, (D)), that is they take an Agentive, an Objective and an optional Dative. However, give follows the preferred choice and makes a surface subject of the noun in the Agentive case "John gave a present to Mary". Receive, on the other hand, makes a surface subject of the noun in the Dative case "Mary received a present from John". It takes children some time to interpret receive sentences correctly.

Language acquisition, irrespective of the linguistic analysis we apply, reveals an intuitive learner-controlled progress from the simpler to the more complex, from the general to the exception. In L2 learning this intuition

is either lost or has little chance to operate because of overloading. For instance, in the natural situation the L2 learner is under pressure to handle multiple case relations with language specific markings irrespective of the grammatical category that expresses them. In the more structured classroom situation the so-called simple sentences provided by course books have never been examined for their case complexities. These are hidden difficulties in language. We must begin to pay attention to them in the foreign language teaching field. An important step in taking this type of complexity into account would be the restructuring of teaching materials. Any effort expended in this area will serve us well as we stand on the threshold of the 1980's.

Modulation of meaning

The very young child and the foreigner in a naturalistic setting can communicate despite minimum grammatical markings because the meaning of the message is also conveyed by the context so that in many situations markings are redundant. Grammatical markings are often dispensable because they "modulate" the basic meanings and are inconceivable without these. For instance, in English the articles

> a and the make the thing referred to by a noun specific or non-specific. The present progressive -ing indicates that a process named by a verb is in progress at the time of speaking, but temporarily so ... It does not seem possible to think of these tunings or modulations without the things and processes they tune whereas it does seem to be possible to conceive of the latter without the former (Brown p. 253).

Brown suggests that

> a major dimension of linguistic development is learning to express always and automatically certain things (agent, action, number, tense and so on) even though these meanings may be in many particular contexts quite redundant (p. 245).

He speculates that it may be

> economical to build up neural networks, ... which will guarantee the invariant expression of certain meanings so that central processing capacity can be left free to deal with the communicational exigencies of each individual situation (p. 242).

Language specific obligatory modulations take a long time to learn in the first language. They are certainly a major stumbling block in learning a second language. One explanation may be that they are not only often redundant but acoustically weak, display a wide variety of irregularities and are not transparent semantically.

The competing pressures on language

Language must be learnable but it must also be an efficient means of communication. Slobin (1975: 3) posits four charges to language. It should:

1. Be clear.
2. Be humanly processible in ongoing time.
3. Be quick and easy.
4. Be expressive.

He asserts that

> Language is always under competing pressure to conform to all four of these charges. Because the pressures are inherently competitory, languages are constantly changing ...
>
> Child language is at first most influenced by the first two charges -- to be clear and to be processible. The child is minimally pressured to transmit a densely structured message in a compact time interval or to adapt his communication to the pragmatics of a wide range of interaction situations. Child speech is close to underlying semantic intent in form and guided by the most basic processing rules (p. 4).

Slobin has given us a set of these basic processing rules which he calls "operating principles" (see Appendix 1). They are based on a list of developmental universals using acquisition data on at least forty languages from fourteen or so major language families. Some of these universals are not relevant in second language acquisition when a certain stage in cognitive development has been reached. Others may in fact play a role in second language learning irrespective of intellectual maturity. It seems to me that operating principles E and F belong to this category. According to Operating Principle E, underlying semantic relations should be marked overtly and clearly.

Here are some examples suggested by Slobin

> of attempts by children to maintain acoustically salient and isolable surface expressions of semantic entities, preferring a one-to-one mapping of content and form wherever possible. (1975: 6).

Example from English: "I will", "I will not", and "do not", where adults would use, "I'll", "I won't", and "don't".

Example from Italian: At one stage the normally optional pronoun is always expressed.

Example from Arabic: The child uses the plural in expressions with numeral and noun for all numbers, contrary to the input language.

(Based on Slobin, 1976: 6)

It is my contention that L2 learners also prefer full marking by virtue of its being more informative.

Operating Principle F stipulates that exceptions should be avoided.

Universal F1: The following stages of linguistic marking of a semantic notion are typically observed (1) no marking, (2) an appropriate marking in limited cases, (3) overgeneralisation of marking (often accompanied by the redundant marking), (4) full adult system.

Universal F2: Rules applicable to larger classes are developed before rules relating to their subdivisions and, general rules are learned before rules for special cases.

(Slobin, 1973: 205)

Scott and Tucker's (1974) data on the learning of English by tertiary Arabic-speaking students supports this universal. For instance, three stages in the acquisition of the verb system have been identified.

> Stage one consists of learning to put in a tense carrier and recognising that the verb should be marked; Stage Two, of learning how to mark the verb; and Stage Three, of learning when the different markers should be used (p. 95).

Curiously Scott and Tucker do not mention overgeneralisation; yet the type of errors attributed to overgeneralisation have attracted a great deal of attention (cf. Dulay and Burt 1972, and others). These errors have been used as proofs for the equivalence of L1/L2 acquisition strategies.

Chun and Politzer (1975) in A Study of Language Acquisition in Two Bilingual Schools, examined the relevance of each principle in turn. They concluded that

> There is a great similarity but not necessarily identity in the strategies used in first and second language acquisition. Some of the proposed universals of first language acquisition which also play a major role in second language learning appear to be: A (paying attention to the end of the word or utterance), D (avoiding interruptions), E (preference for overtly-marked semantic relations), F (avoidance of exceptions) (p. 152).

In the future we may well expect greater concentration on research in these areas.

## Semantic Primitives

So far I have concentrated on language learning at the sentence level, i.e. on the semantic relationships within a sentence and how they are expressed. More specifically, I have tried to show how easy or difficult it is to learn these surface expressions.

Now I would like to look at language at the lexical level. Generally words are considered the building blocks of language. In our schools they are given the status of the basic units of language. Undoubtedly, words have a psychological reality. Learning to speak implies the ability to segment the flow of speech into words. Unless sentences are analysed in this way, their elements cannot be recombined to form new sentences. They are easily recognizable in writing as they are divided by gaps on the printed page. Linguists have found the term "word" ambiguous and prefer the expression "lexical item", namely a unit that has one referent, e.g.: English to write poetry, German dichten. In this discussion I shall use word or lexical item and vocabulary or lexicon interchangeably.

Words are difficult to define. Another salient fact is that

> lexical items of a language are not the basic units of meaning, rather, they are made up of syntactically structured combinations of smaller semantic units variously termed components, markers, semantic predicates, features, etc. These components are not unique to various lexical items but rather occur in a number of different words ... (For instance) a semantic component or predicate which is said to play an important role in the English lexicon is CAUSE (Bowerman, 1974: 149).

This is present in a verb like kill: cause to die. In this instance, CAUSE can be decomposed further into the semantic notion BECOME and a state: thus kill corresponds to cause to become dead. The predicate CAUSE also helps to illuminate the relationship between:

(a) open (transitive) "Open the window!"

(b) open (intransitive) "The window is open."

(c) open (adjective) "He climbed through the open window."

The semantic primitive CAUSE is included in (a) open but not in (b) open and (c) open. This analysis is peculiar to English. Other languages may have different rules for bonding semantic primitives into lexical items, or alternatively express them by periphrastic or syntactic means. What natural languages do have in common is some universal set of semantic features "from which particular languages draw their individual stock" (Beaver and Rosenbaum 1970: 5).

Beaver and Rosenbaum propose a theory of lexical hierarchy to distinguish "lexical gaps which are systematically explained by the lexical structure of language from those gaps which have no such explanation and therefore are 'accidental'" (pp.12-13). Binnick's (1968) analysis of some transitive motion verbs will serve as an illustration of the existence of lexical structures consisting of "traditionally observed units which are neither surface words nor underlying lexical items, but nonetheless have linguistic reality to the extent that people have talked about them for two thousand years" (p. 11).

For instance, the transitive motion verbs can be glossed by phrases containing go or come and a preposition. But as each one can play the dual role of an active, motive verb or a stative, locative verb, further analysis is necessary to make these differences in meaning explicit. Consider:

(1) Caesar crossed the English Channel (active, motive).

(2) Route 80 crosses Iowa (stative, locative).

(3) The announcer entered the studio (active, motive).

(4) The railroad enters the town near the post office (stative, locative).

(Adapted from Binnick, 1968: 1-2)

Transitive motion verbs and causal verbs are the products of general rules in English which allow certain combinations. All possible combinations are not used by any language. In English according to Bowerman (1974) there are no single verbs meaning "cause to climb" or "cause to disappear" although, as we have seen, a single verb can encode a complex causative concept.

One can look at word meaning in two ways. Firstly, how words relate to extralinguistic objects and events. Secondly, how they relate to each other and the phrases in the language, or in Bowerman's words how "the lexicon, or more generally, the meaning system of a language, is internally structured" (p. 156). The first approach, Bowerman suggests, focuses more on cognitive, the second on linguistic distinctions. The latter implies that the ways "in which units of semantic materials can be combined to form possible lexical items" (p.150) must be of a native speaker's competence.

> Thus, semantic components like CAUSE and BECOME are not intended to directly represent the way in which speakers perceive the situation to which they refer. Rather they are abstractions which represent a kind of distillation of those aspects of cognition which are relevant to the meaning-structure of a language taken as a whole, not one word at a time (Bowerman, 157).

Acquisition of semantics.

How is this abstract rule system for word formation acquired? Does it follow the phonological and syntactic acquisition pattern of initial absence of the form, then realisation based on partial application of rules and on use of unanalysed forms, overgeneralization of rules, and finally, mature use of form? Bowerman, who has analysed the speech of her daughter Christy, has found that the semantic primitive CAUSE did develop in this sequence. Two types of spontaneous errors that the child made between the

ages of two to four are of particular interest. On the one hand she produced novel periphrastic constructions "I made it full" (I filled it). On the other hand she generalized the concept to verbs that are not causative. Her novel causative verbs included "I'm singing him" (I made him sing).

"Unanalysed" forms appear early in the developmental sequence. They are words or phrases the child uses without being aware of their internal structure and therefore does not recognise that they consist of elements which have combinatorial power. Brown (1973: 391-395) has documented this phenomenon at the phrase level. The children he studied used "What's that"? "It's" without being aware of the presence of the copula be with its independent function. Bowerman (pp. 159-160) reports that children as old as seven, although they use compound nouns like "milkman" appropriately, may not be aware of how the two separate morphemes link the sense of the word as a whole. In this example, the sub-components appear on the surface. In a word like "kill" they do not. There is no identifiable sub-component which would reveal the presence of CAUSE in "kill" (cause to die).

Bowerman quotes Miller in support of the view that the acquisition of word meaning is gradual. Children acquire the referential aspects first and add the multiple differentiations that constitute the sense of those words in the adult's lexicon. She further draws our attention to the fact that

> there appears to be no necessary correlation between the semantic complexity of a word and the cognitive complexity of its referent. Thus, a child could learn to use "throw" (for which Miller suggests a complex underlying semantic structure such as "apply force by hand to make X begin travelling through the air") in a generally appropriate way before he learned exactly which aspects of the referential act of throwing are the semantically critical ones which both relate the word to and contrast it with other words (p. 160).

According to Bowerman, recognition of the CAUSE concept is the basis for the development of

> causative sentences of many different types (that) can be regarded as fundamentally alike in that they all have deep structures in which a causal relationship between two propositions is shown ... Understanding the structure of causative sentences involves recognizing the underlying presence of this relationship between a cause and an effect even if the relationship is obscured in surface structure ... (p. 164).

Superficially simple sentences can hide two conceptually distinctive propositions. As an example, Bowerman quotes her daughter; "'Mommy opens a box' (Mommy does something which causes the box to become open)" (p. 164). She further observes that the relatively late appearance of sentences containing both the verb and the indirect object at a stage when three word sentences are already common, can be explained by the fact that they express a relationship between a causing action and an effect.

Acquisition of Semantics.

The Universal Primitives Hypothesis has far-reaching consequences for L1 and L2 acquisition. Firstly, the child would not have to learn the primitives themselves since they are innate in the sense that they are biologically determined. Herbert Clark (1973) explains with respect to the English expressions of space and time that the child only has to learn

> how to apply these expressions to the a priori knowledge he has about space and time. This a priori knowledge is separate from language itself and is not so mysterious. The knowledge ... is simply what the child knows about space given that he lives on this planet, has a particular perceptual apparatus, and moves around in a characteristic manner. The exact form of this knowledge, then, is dependent on man's biological endowment - that he has two eyes, ears, etc., that he stands upright, and so on - and in this sense it is innate ... The thesis is simply that the child knows much about space and time before he learns the English terms for space and time, and his acquisition of these terms is built onto his prior cognitive development (p. 28).

This implies learning "which combinations of primitives have lexical exponents in his language, and which do not" (Clark, E. 1973 p. 71). Further, it needs to be pointed out that "we still have little idea how to identify the primitives, much less any notion of what form the rules for their combination into the appropriate lexical items would take within a

a particular language" (p. 71).

The Universal Primitives Hypothesis makes nonsense of the question that is often put to bilinguals: "In what language do you think?" It has to be rephrased, "In what language do you lexicalise?" It is the possibility of alternative lexicalisation that makes L2 learning and bilingualism possible. The analysis of the CAUSATIVE concept in English gives us a useful insight into semantic complexity and its surface manifestations. The latter may not be of the same order of complexity across languages. Slobin has illustrated this point with the positional locative in, which in its surface expression is linguistically simpler in Hungarian compared with Serbo-Croatian. In Hungarian it is marked in a way which is acoustically salient and consistent. In Serbo-Croatian, prepositions and case are paired in a semi-arbitrary manner involving complex rules. Accordingly a three-year-old bilingual child who had obviously mastered the positional locative in, in Hungarian "doll in drawer", had not as yet mastered it in Serbo-Croatian "doll drawer" (Slobin, 1973).

Style Variation.

Smith (1972) discusses the question of alternatives or synonymity in L1 and L2 acquisition in an illuminating way. The child acquiring his L1

> has not learned all the rules for categorizing reality ... If he uses both of the members of a synonym pair, he will probably use them with reference to different denotata (p. 71).

Smith contrasts this with the adult speaker in whose speech

> a lexeme (word) constitutes a bundle of denotata and connotata with synonyms being lexemes having identical denotata but different connotata. For the neophyte language learner the connotata are often missing. Consequently, he sees synonyms as meaning exactly the same, and one of the pair may not be used (pp. 70-71).

Why are synonyms necessary? This draws attention to Slobin's fourth charge to language: "to be expressive". It is the rhetorically expressive aspect of language that makes it so complex.

> In order for Language to be rhetorically expressive it must be possible to present information in a variety of ways, focusing on this or that, guiding or checking the listener's attention, distinguishing between what is new or old information, expected or unexpected statement and so forth (Slobin 1975: 25).

A speaker's expressive power is based on his skill in style variation. It is in this respect that native speakers vary in their competence to handle the resources of their language. A person's stylistic choice is determined not only by the rules of discourse but also by the social functions of language. His utterance will be determined by his mood, status, role relationship with the addressee, topic, situation, etc; so that the form of his message will also convey meaning. This inferred meaning cannot be avoided, although some languages make it easier to keep the message socially neutral compared to others. By neutrality I mean that there is less emphasis on signalling sex, age, etc. A native speaker commanding a single style only is hard to imagine. He would certainly be socially and intellectually unacceptable. This is precisely what is happening to immigrant adults in our community. They do not enjoy the dispensation granted to foreign tourists who do not speak the local language. Social bilinguals are expected to know the rules of style variation, in other words, acquire communicative competence.

The child can rely on his conceptual development to guide his communicative competence. He has a mentor in the socialising process (cf. Gleason, 1973; Gleason and Weintraub, 1975). Consequently, some socially appropriate forms of requests are recognised already by two-year-olds (Ervin-Tripp, 1974). Other forms do not appear and are not expected until late adolescence (cf. Lambert, 1969, T-V usage by French Canadians; Maley, 1972). This is another example of the L2 learner being handicapped by the absence of natural controls in the L2 learning situation. In fact, adolescent L2 learners might be placed in a position where they are to make stylistic distinctions in L2 which they have not yet mastered in L1.

Acceleration in second language learning.

Now that I have reviewed the hidden complexities of language and the difficulty of approaching the second language learning task in an orderly sequence from the simpler to the more complex, I would like to look at the positive side of the picture. Second language learning can be speeded up. The rate of acquisition of the first language is, on the whole, impervious to outside pressure. The time scale of first language learning is broadly predictable; that of second language is not. Cognitive development and language universals make acceleration in second language learning possible.

The phonological system is assimilated with remarkable speed. Of course the task is a different one. The learner does not have to recreate the total sound system of a language: Rather he must adjust and expand what he already knows. The phonological development of the first language learner may not be completed by the age of five, but it yields the perfect result of a native-like accent. This can be recaptured for another five to six years by the pre-adolescent L2 learner in the period when his syntactic development is still very much in evidence in his L1. At the inception of puberty the ability to acquire a good approximation of a native-like accent in L2 varies independently of the other language skills.

Fathman (1975) tested children learning English between the ages of 6 to 15 years. Her results

> suggest that there is a difference in the rate of learning of English morphology, syntax and phonology based upon differences in age, but that the order of acquisition in second language learning does not change with age (245).

She concludes her report by stating that

> These data alone do not prove that there is necessarily a critical period for second language learning, but they do suggest that the ability to learn certain aspects of a second language may be age related.
>
> The reasons for these differences may be related to maturational, physiological or environmental factors. There may actually be different critical periods which are optimal times for learning different aspects of a second language. The preteen years may encompass a period during which the ability to discriminate, to

> interpret or to imitate sounds, is manifested most fully; whereas, after puberty the ability to learn rules, to make generalisations or to memorize patterns may be more fully developed (251).

The optimum period for L2 learning is the great puzzle of second language learning. I find it less interesting, however, than questions such as: Why is second language learning less than perfect? and Why does it show such individual variation?

Theories trying to answer these questions abound. I have added my own by drawing attention to the probable overloading during the acquisition period, and the difference in time scale. In fact, given sufficient time and opportunity, at least in vocabulary and syntax, a second language speaker can almost match his intellectual and educational counterpart in the first language. I deliberately mentioned counterpart because the L2 speaker may or may not, have maintained his first language to a degree that could serve as a useful comparison with his L2. Language teachers rarely witness a native-like perfection because the contact between them and their students is simply too short. They are further frustrated by individual variation in their classroom. Cazden et al. (1975) have listed the affective variables that may influence progress in second language learning. They include:

1. Acculturation.
2. Attitude and Motivation.
3. Ego-permeability (p.58).

I would like to describe how the variable of ego-permeability in L2 learning has been tested by Guiora et al. (1975).

> ... we decided to attack the problem of the proposed link between empathy and pronunciation through experimental manipulation. We had hypothesized that underlying the altering of the sound of one's speech is a process of altering one's self-representation. Such alteration requires some degree of flexibility of psychic processes or permeability to ego boundaries. Suppose, then, that we were to attempt experimentally to increase this flexibility and then ask people to imitate foreign language sounds? Our prediction was that increased flexibility would lead to superior pronunciation.

> The easiest means of inducing this flexible psychic state was through alcoholic drinks. Alcohol, a depressant, is often said to lower inhibition. Most studies of the effects of alcohol on various types of performance show impairment of functioning at many levels. However, a few studies have shown that certain types of performance may be enhanced when the blood alcohol level is moderate to low.
>
> In 1972 we conducted a study in which 87 male subjects were given drinks containing 0, 1, 1-½, 2 or 3 ounces of alcohol. ...
>
> Our conclusion to this study was that our hypothesis about the nature of the psychological processes involved in pronounciation ability was confirmed. A small amount of alcohol, which we predicted should lower inhibitions and thus theoretically increase permeability of ego boundaries, enhanced the ability to authentically pronounce a second language. There appears to be an early positive stage of intoxication-positive, that is, for particular performances which do not demand highly integrated ego functioning, such as the Digit Symbol Test. This so-called positive stage, however, is very quickly passed so that the relationship between pronunciation ability and alcohol consumption is a curvilinear one. In short, the Alcohol Study made an important theoretical point but has obviously no practical implications for language teaching (pp. 52-53).

Clearly, slight intoxication is not a reliable characteristic of the good language student. Nevertheless, the concept of the "good" student might be worth pursuing. If we can identify him on the basis of his learning strategies we may be able to help our students to develop more productive techniques.

Stern (1974) and his research group at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education have explored the topic of the good language learner by means of teacher/student interviews, a battery of personality tests and classroom observations. On the basis of these they have drawn up a table showing the connections between strategies and personality traits (see Appendix 2). Modern language teachers could use this as a check list by comparing it on the basis of introspection, with their own strategies and personality traits. This would be a valid exercise for members of the present audience as I presume that a modern language teachers' conference is by implication a conference of "good" language learners.

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Language Acquisition Operating Principles. Appendix 1.

(Slobin, D.I. 1973 "Cognitive Prerequisites for the Development of Grammar." "Studies of Child Language Development, p.p. 175-208. Eds. C.A. Ferguson and D.I. Slobin, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. )

OPERATING PRINCIPLE A: Pay attention to the ends of words.

Universal A1: For any given semantic notion, grammatical realizations in the form of suffixes or postpositions will be acquired earlier than realizations in the form of prefixes or prepositions.

OPERATING PRINCIPLE B: The phonological forms of words can be systematically modified.

OPERATING PRINCIPLE C: Pay attention to the order of words and morphemes.

Universal C1: The standard order of functor morphemes in the input language is preserved in child speech.

Universal C2: Word order in child speech reflects word order in the input language.

Universal C3: Sentences deviating from standard word order will be interpreted at early stages of development as if they were examples of standard word order.

OPERATING PRINCIPLE D: Avoid interruption or rearrangement of linguistic units.

Universal D1: Structures requiring permutation of elements will first appear in non-permuted form.

Universal D2: Whenever possible, discontinuous morphemes will be reduced to, or replaced by continuous morphemes.

Universal D3: There is a tendency to preserve the structure of the sentence as a close entity, reflected in a development from sentence-external placement of various linguistic forms to their movement within the sentence.

Universal D4: The greater the separation between related parts of a sentence, the greater the tendency that sentences will not be adequately processed (in imitation, comprehension, or production).

OPERATING PRINCIPLE E: Underlying semantic relations should be marked overtly and clearly.

Universal E1: A child will begin to mark a semantic notion earlier if its morphological realization is more salient perceptually (ceteris paribus).

Universal E2: There is a preference not to mark a semantic category by Ø ("zero morpheme"). If a category is sometimes marked by Ø and sometimes by some overt phonological form, the latter will, at some stage, also replace the Ø.

Universal E3: If there are homonymous forms in an intellectual system, those forms will tend not to be the earliest inflections acquired by the child, i.e. the child tends to select phonologically unique forms, when available, as the first realization of inflections.

Appendix 1.

Universal E4: When a child first controls a full form of a linguistic entity which can undergo contraction or deletion, contractions or deletions of such entities tend to be absent.

Universal E5: It is easier to understand a complex sentence in which optionally deletable material appears in its full form.

OPERATING PRINCIPLE F: Avoid exceptions.

Universal F1: The following stages of linguistic making of a semantic notion are typically observed :(1) no marking, (2) appropriate marking in limited cases, (3) overgeneralization of marking (often accompanied by redundant marking), (4) full adult system.

Universal F2: Rules applicable to larger classes are developed before rules relating to their subdivisions, and general rules are learned before rules for special cases.

OPERATING PRINCIPLE G: The use of grammatical markers should make semantic sense.

Universal G1: When selection of an appropriate inflection among a group of inflections performing the same semantic function is determined by arbitrary formal criteria (e.g. phonological shape of stem, number of syllables in stem, arbitrary gender of stem), the child initially learns to use a single form in all environments, ignoring formal selection restrictions.

Universal G2: Errors in choice of functor are always within the given functor class and subcategory.

Universal G3: Semantically consistent grammatical rules are acquired early and without significant error.

Source: RADO, M. "Slobin's Operating Principles and Second Language Learning."
Working Papers in Language and Linguistics. 1975 1(2):39-50

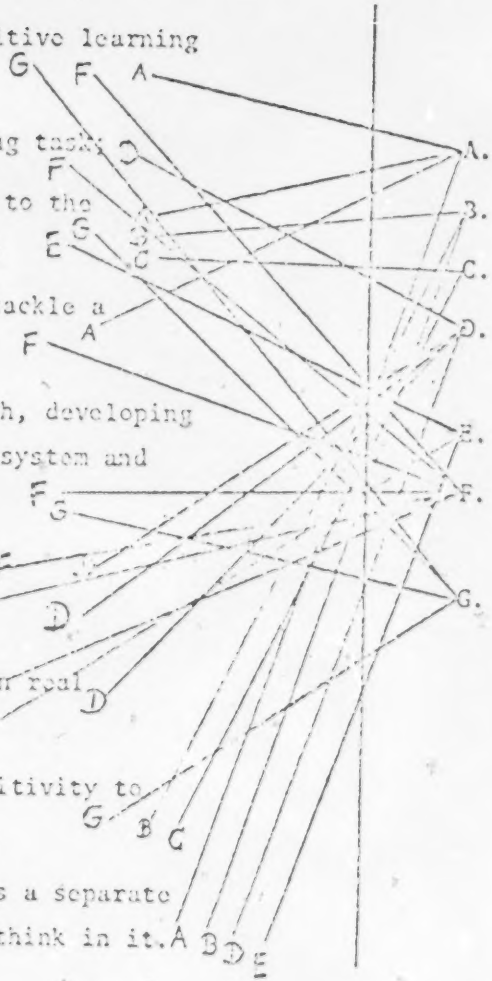
H.H. Stern, Modern Language Center, Ontario Institute
for Studies in Education, 1974.



TABLE I

Strategies and Personality

1. A personal learning style or positive learning strategies;
2. An active approach to the learning task;
3. A tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language and its speakers;
4. Technical know-how about how to tackle a language;
5. A methodical but flexible approach, developing the new language into an ordered system and constantly revising this system;
6. Constantly searching for meaning;
7. Willingness to practice;
8. Willingness to use the language in real communication;
9. Self-monitoring and critical sensitivity to language use; and
10. Developing the L2 more and more as a separate reference system and learning to think in it.



A. An element of insight and self-awareness;
B. Frustration tolerance;
C. A low anxiety level (self reliance);
D. A high level of achievement and motivation (perfectionism, goal consciousness);
E. A social (integrative) orientation;
F. Task orientation (professionalism, technical know-how); and
G. Cognitive flexibility (adaptability, lack of rigidity).